Música Tejana, or Texas-Mexican music, is contagious and makes you want to dance. Its diverse beat can be a polka, a cumbia, a bolero, or a ranchera. It can also have influences from other musical styles such as disco, pop, rap, country, and reggae. Música Tejana sounds come from a variety of instruments, including accordions, synthesizers, electric guitars, congas, or “pitos” (horns). This type of music, known as “Tejano” in the contemporary period, is extremely popular in Texas and other parts of the United States and Mexico.

Despite its popularity, a great deal of misunderstanding about this music persists. Is música Tejana, for instance, a particular form of music that has lost its ability to “connect” with its audience because of its commercialization or is it still “culturally meaningful” to Tejanos? Is this music, in other words, an “organic” symbol of Tejano culture, or has it become a “superorganic” commodity to be consumed by an anonymous mass disconnected from the history and culture of Tejanos? Is música Tejana based on the accordion, the saxophones, the keyboards, or is it a mixture of these? What types of songs comprise this music? Some commentators, for instance, have argued that “Tejano” is conjunto or accordion-based music that has been “urbanized” and modernized. By modernization, these commentators generally argue that the traditional conjunto sound incorporates more instruments, especially the keyboards, and borrows heavily from other music forms like rock and country. Others argue that Tejano is either an extension of Mexican music in general, a modified form of música norteña, that is, conjunto music from northern México, or a mixture of conjunto music and country and western sounds. Manuel Peña argues that Tejano is a particular type of music that is “synthesizer-driven.” Vilma Maldonado, a journalist for the McAllen Monitor, states that Tejano music also includes the styles popularized by orquestas and grupos of the 1960s and 1970s.

Which of these is a more accurate definition of this complex music? Is música Tejana culturally significant for Chicanos and Chicanas? What is the relationship between música Tejana and norteño music, or música Tejana and Mexican music? What about American musical forms? How do they relate to música Tejana? This essay is aimed at answering these types of questions.
Before I begin, let me clarify several key terms. One of these is “Tejano,” and the other is Texas-Mexican music or música Tejana, its Spanish equivalent. Tejano is not the same as música Tejana. Tejano is a term of recent vintage that refers to the music played by Tejano artists in the latter part of the twentieth century. It came into common usage in the 1980s, but most commentators do not agree on what it means. The term Tejano, then, generally means whatever one chooses it to be. In my view, it is not a useful term for understanding the historical complexity and diversity of this music.6

Música Tejana, then, is not a single music but a complex set of musical forms, styles, and genres. It is comprised of five distinct essential elements. First, música Tejana is a particular form of border music. Its unique sounds were created or performed by Tejanos living along the Rio Grande border and those who are “on the border” of two distinct cultural worlds. The concept of the border includes two dimensions, a physical and a metaphysical.

The physical notion of the border refers to a particular location encompassing those communities along both sides of the Rio Grande. In other words, it includes the areas of South Texas and northern México. The latter includes the northern México states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León.7 The former encompasses a geographical area of the state that extends from Corpus Christi on the east, to San Antonio on the north, to Laredo on the west, and to Brownsville on the south. From the Spanish colonial era in the mid-1700s to the middle of the nineteenth century, South Texas actually encompassed the region from the Nueces River to the Rio Grande border. According to Armando C. Alonzo, this area was considered a part of the “gobierno,” or government, of Nuevo Santander (1797-1824) and later Tamaulipas (1824-1845). Spanish/Mexican authorities and colonists, in turn, generally viewed the smaller territory occupying the space from San Antonio to the Louisiana border as “Texas.” After the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the establishment of an international border, San Antonio came to be recognized as part of the South Texas “homeland.”8

Música Tejana, although originating along both sides of the border, was nurtured mostly in South Texas. This is particularly true in the twentieth century. Distinct areas of this region contributed in their own ways to the development of its content and style. The lower border region, for instance, became the music’s historical “breeding ground.” It produced the originators of the conjunto ensemble such as Bruno Villarreal, Narciso Martínez and Valerio Longoria and created many of the corridos popular in the Tejano community.9 The San Antonio area, in turn, became a center of strong support and active promotion of the various forms of música Tejana, especially conjunto music, probably because it had the largest concentration of Tejanos in the state for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sam Suniga, archivist and researcher for the Tejano Music Awards, also argues that San Antonio historically has had one of the highest per capita rates of Tejano composers and songwriters in the state.10 Alice and its surrounding communities,
including Corpus Christi on the Gulf Coast, on the other hand, became the creative centers of this music.\textsuperscript{13}

The Alice area, in particular, played a key role in the creation, promotion, and popularity of música Tejana during the past six decades.\textsuperscript{14} In addition to consolidating the conjunto style of playing, musicians from this area created two distinct ensembles—the orquesta Tejana and the grupo Tejano. Alice also was the home to Ideal Records, one of the most significant Tejano recording companies of the post-World War II era. From 1946 to the 1960s, it popularized the various forms of música Tejana and recorded many of the leading conjunto, orquesta, and female musicians. In the 1970s, Corpus Christi continued and expanded this rich tradition of musical recordings. In the early years of this decade, it became and continues to be the home to Freddie Records and Hacienda Records, two of the most influential forces in the Tejano music industry during the 1970s and 1980s. Together these three studios recorded most of the major artists that shaped the contours of música Tejana during the twentieth century. Among the most influential musicians recorded by these companies were Lydia Mendoza, Laura y Carmen, Beto Villa, Isidro López, Tony de la Rosa, Conjunto Bernal, Los Relámpagos del Norte, Ramón Ayala y Los Bravos del Norte, Los Fabulosos Cuatro, Carlos Guzmán, Laura Canales, Sunny Ozuna, Freddie Martínez, Augustoín Ramírez, and Selena.

Música Tejana has also been created or performed by Tejano musicians who do not live in South Texas. Two of the most popular Tejano musical groups of the 1980s and 1990s, La Sombra and La Mafia, for instance, were from Chicago, Illinois, and Houston, Texas, respectively. Despite their distance from South Texas, these musicians continued to play border music because they were on the “border” of two clashing cultures. Used in this manner, the concept of “the border” means more than simply a geographical or physical space. It also refers...
to a series of "sites" or arenas that are present "wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy."15 Those who live on "the border," then, refers to those living the contradiction of being socially and culturally distinct in a society that despises differences. It also applies to those trying to negotiate the ever-present pressures of assimilation and ethnic loyalty. An example of this is the orquesta Tejana of the post-World War II era and the music it developed in response to the Tejano's "middle" position between an unappreciative dominant society and a large group of working-class Mexicanos.16

Second, música Tejana is a Tejano creation; that is, it has been created, adapted, or performed by Tejanos to meet the musical sensibilities of other Tejanos. As early as the 1920s, Tejanos were demanding that traditional Mexican music reflect their sensibilities by including instruments and singing styles with which they could identify and appreciate. In the early part of the twentieth century, much of this focused on the sounds of the accordion. In post-World War II years, Tejano musicians continued to adapt Mexican music to meet Tejano musical sensibilities in several ways. They incorporated vocal singing in general and female duet singing in particular into música Tejana, which had been mostly instrumental. They also supported the continued use of the accordion and the bajo sexto instrumentation in conjuntos. Finally, they incorporated the unique sounds of the saxophone and the trumpet (los pitos or horn section as it came to be known years later) to create the orquesta Tejana. In the second half of the 20th century, Tejanos continued to adapt this music by adding organs, brass instruments, electric guitars, and keyboards. Additionally, they played and sang the lyrics of these songs in a style unique to them.

Because it is an "indigenous" creation, música Tejana has reflected this community's unique historical experiences in the state. Prior to the middle of the twentieth century, most of these experiences were based on a rural economy, a subordinate social status, a traditional patriarchal culture, and constant conflict with Anglos. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Tejano community became more urbanized, acculturated, occupationally diverse, and less patriarchal. They also experienced better relations with the dominant Anglo group and with mainstream institutions.17 In all its various forms and through its content, music reflected these experiences.

Corridos, for instance, played a key role in expressing and reflecting the historical conflict between Anglos and Mexicans in South Texas in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.18 Corridos, as several scholars have noted, are ballads that narrate a story and are sung to a simple tune.19 They emerged and developed during a century of profound and violent changes along the Rio Grande and South Texas that embraced the years from 1836 to the 1930s.20 In many ways, corridos were the product of a subordinate society whose only means of fighting the dominant Anglo powers was symbolic.21 Representative of this type of corrido and its hero was "The Corrido of Gregorio Cortez," an individual who single-handedly fought the Anglo law and won.22 After 1930, the corrido remained culturally significant, but it declined in popularity. It also shifted its focus from the cultural hero to the helpless victim. By portraying helpless victims rather than potent cultural heroes, the newer corridos after the 1930s aroused sympathy for the victim and spurred Texas-Mexican communities to take collective action for the benefit of all. The real hero in these corridos turned out to be the organized and politically active community as a whole, not the individual.23

Canciones, or traditional Mexican songs, on the other hand, reflected the continuity and change of Mexican culture in the state.24 Canciones were comprised of several types and, in addition to corridos, included, among others, canciones tipicas, canciones rancheras, and canciones romanticas. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, the canción tica and the corrido dominated the vocal music of Tejanos.25 The canción tica became increasingly important by the latter part of the nineteenth century, but by 1900 the canción romántica, a canción "subtype" was rapidly becoming dominant among Tejanos.26 In the twentieth century, the canción ranchera emerged as a dominant type of song among Tejanos.

Canciones dealt with a variety of themes, most of which focused on non-political topics, especially love. For this reason, they tended to reflect the continuity of traditional Mexican rural culture in the state.27 They rarely reflected the profound changes within Mexican culture as did corridos. Although canciones tended to reflect the traditional cultural practices of Tejanos, in some cases this was not so. The "treacherous woman" theme popular in the canción ranchera, for instance, consistently portrayed Mexican women as traitorous and unfaithful to men. However, reality indicated that men, rather than women, were more likely to be unfaithful. These types of songs reversed existing gender norms in the Tejano community and thus did not accurately reflect them.27

Música Tejana also reflected the emerging social differences within Tejanos. Instrumental dance music, for instance, reflected the growing class distinctions of this community. The orquestas and grupos reflected the rise of the Tejano lower and middle classes, whereas the conjunto reflected the dominance of the working classes.28 Likewise, canciones, especially the canción tica and the canción romántica, reflected social differences within the Tejano community. The former was associated with working-class aesthetics and the latter with a middle-class one. Stated differently, the former was generally of a folk or working-class nature, with simple tune and lyrics, of anonymous composition, and often of ancient ori-
gins. The latter was more specifically associated with modern Latin American urban culture and its attraction to European music imported to the Americas, especially Italian music. These distinctions remained submerged among Tejanos until the 1920s, when the canción típica acquired a new label and became known as the canción ranchera. The new ranchera then became the property of the disfranchised masses on both sides of the border.29

After World War II the canción ranchera and the canción romántica solidified their positions within the social class structure of the community.30 Despite these differences, there was never a rigid dichotomy.31

Finally, música Tejana reflected the specific ethnic identity of the Tejano population. This music was more than simply a response to subordination or a reflection of social differences. For many, it was also an expression of pride in the Mexicano ethnic identity as it developed along the border and throughout the state of Texas. The use of distinct in-group labels for this music reflects this pride. Under pressure to assimilate in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, they used Spanish-language terms such as fandangos and bailes to indicate pride in their music. In the post-World War II period, they called their music by distinct labels such as conjunto, orquesta, or, more generally, Tex-Mex music or música Tejana. In the 1960s and 1970s, Tejanos referred to the diverse styles of music as La Onda Chicana. Recent uses of the term “Tejano” and all its derivatives, for example, Tejano proud, totally Tejano, and puro Tejano reflect this ethnic pride. “Tejano (in the 1990s) is, as much as anything, an attitude,” argues Héctor Galán, the noted Mexican-American cultural videographer. “It’s as if to say: ‘This is us.’”32

Because Tejanos have created, produced, and performed this music, it has remained culturally meaningful to them. Commercialization and internationalization has definitely impacted this music over time, especially in the last several decades, but it has not lost its ability to affirm and reaffirm distinct ethnic and social bonds. Música Tejana, in other words, has not succumbed to the dictates of the capitalist markets and become a mere commodity as suggested by Manuel Peña.33 It is not a “detached form of entertainment,” nor is it a “commodity that is consumed atomistically.” Instead, it is a powerful symbol of Tejano ethnic and cultural identity and an instrument of purposeful and meaningful social interaction for a people who live along the border and who are on the border of two distinct worlds.

Third, música Tejana is mostly Mexican music sung in Spanish. Because it is based on Mexican music, it is rooted in the history of the Americas. More specifically, its roots lie in the musical heritage of Spain and indigenous America and in the interactions between these two major groups.

Música Tejana is also intimately related to noroeste or northern Mexican culture. Between the 1700s and the mid-1800s, this music was an integral part of the Spanish and Mexican culture brought by settlers to the northern frontier of México and shaped or influenced by local and regional conditions. In the period after 1848, however, northern Mexican culture was fractured as a result of the establishment of the Rio Grande as an international border. Although this culture was similar on both sides of the border, commentators soon began to make distinctions between the Mexican culture found in
South Texas and the Mexican culture found in northern Mexico. The former eventually came to be known as Tejano culture, the latter as Norteño culture. Both, however, came from one primary source: central Mexico. This phenomenon helps to explain the presence of similar cultural and musical forms on both sides of the border.

Unfortunately, little is known about how this music (and the culture of which it is an integral part) was brought to Texas, how it was played, or what instruments were used to play it. The little information available we have is from the last one hundred years. Much of the following comments are thus based on the music's development since the latter part of the 1800s.

Generally speaking, Texas-Mexican music has been comprised of a diverse and changing repertoire of songs and dances. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, polkas, huapangos, valses (waltzes), schottises (schottische), and mazurkas were the major dance forms in música Tejana. Since the 1940s, new ones such as boleros, mambos, danzones, and cumbias, as well as fox-trots, rhythm and blues, soul, funk, rock, country, and pop have been added to Tejano music.

Tejano music also is comprised of a variety of canciones or songs, such as canciones típicas, románticas, corridos, and rancheras, sung to a variety of beats including polkas, valses, baladas, and cumbias. Despite this diversity, música Tejana in the twentieth century has been based primarily on the polka beat. Polkas, like other Mexican folk dances such as the vals (waltz) and the schottis (schottische), are European in origin. They were brought to México by the elite in the early nineteenth century and to the Southwest by the German, Bohemian, Italian, and Czech immigrants who settled in central Texas and in northern México during the first half of the nineteenth century. Sometime after the 1850s, Mexican musicians on both sides of the border appropriated these dance forms and made them their own. The French invasion of México in the 1860s most likely reinforced these and other European musical and dance traditions throughout northern México and the southwestern United States.

The polka emerged as a dominant form of Tejano dance music sometime in the early twentieth century, probably as a result of the rise of recorded music and of desires for dancing among the Mexican origin population. The dominance of the polka is reflected in the historical recordings made by Arhoolie Records in the early 1970s. According to these comprehensive and representative recordings, 37% of all conjunto music recorded in the years from 1927 to 1941 were polkas. The next largest categories of dance forms were the schottis and vals at 19% and 12%, respectively.

In the post-World War II period, the polka continued its dominance as all types of groups constantly played it. The polka beat also became more popular during these years with the rise of the ranchera Tejana. This type of song is quite different from the ranchera M éxica de. In México, the ranchera is a particular type of rural-based canción que became popular during the early twentieth century. The content of these songs spoke about male notions of honor, love, and life in a rural environment; usually the rancho (ranch). México rancheras were sung to a variety of beats and played mostly by mariachi groups. The Texas ranchera retained its emphasis on male notions of honor, love, and life, but the rhythms and the type of groups that played this music were different. Unlike the México ranchera, the Tejano version was sung mostly to a polka beat. It was performed by the three major types of Tejano groups, none of which were mariachis: female-based duets, accordion-based conjuntos, and saxophone-based orquestas.

In the post-World War II period, the ranchera, that is, the polka with lyrics, as well as the instrumental polka, became the dominant form of song and dance in música Tejana. The increased demand for dancing among the Tejano population and the easy steps accompanying the polka probably led to its dominance. Despite its popularity, by the end of the twentieth century, the cumbia became a strong competitor to the ranchera and emerged as the most popular type of song and dance in the community.

Another essential element of this music is its language. For all intents and purposes, Texas-Mexican music is Spanish-language music. Although a few songs have been recorded bilingually or in English only, the vast majority of them are sung in Spanish. The Spanish language, in association with the polka and ranchera, keeps this music rooted in Mexican culture.

Moreover, Spanish-language music is the most important means for preserving Tejano culture in the United States. Although Spanish-language institutions, such as the press or the TV, are readily found in Tejano communities throughout the state, most of these are aimed at the immigrant population. Tejanos, most of whom are native born for the most part, are exposed to and socialized by English-speaking institutions such as public schools, radio, or print media. Tejano music is the only means currently available within the English-speaking Tejano population that promotes Spanish. For this reason, this music has become a crucial instrument for preserving the community's link to its cultural heritage in a country that is rigidly assimilationist and non-appreciative of ethnic differences.

Fourth, although música Tejana is mostly Mexican music, it has consistently been updated and modernized over the decades. The notion of “modernization” has changed over the years and depended, in many cases, on what has been popular in American or Mexican music at different points during the twentieth century. The modernizing of música Tejana occurred in complex ways involving several overlapping processes. One of these was the selective incorporation of American, Caribbean, and Latin American rhythms and instruments. Another was the appropriation, adaptation, and inclusion of other distinct musical styles. I discuss some of these processes below to illustrate their...
complexity in a tentative effort to illustrate the diverse ways in which Mexican music has been modernized, rather than to give a comprehensive list of all these possibilities.

1. Incorporation of different types of instruments

Some groups utilized instruments and styles associated with American or Latin American groups to play Mexican music. During the post-World War II era, for instance, Beto Villa and Isidro López utilized the saxophones, trumpets and other instruments associated with both American and Latin American orquestas of that period to play their music. Little Joe, Sunny Ozuna, and Freddie Martinez in the 1960s and 1970s also used these saxophones and trumpets, but they added organs and electric guitars to the instrumental mix. These musical instruments were associated not with orchestras of that era, but with rock and soul groups. Grupo musicians of the most recent period, for example, Mazz, Selena, and La Mafia, modified the instrumental mix while adding keyboards to their ensembles. In the 1970s, a few groups such as Country Roland and Country Roland, Jr., utilized the violin, the steel guitar, and the vocal singing style of country music to play Tejano tunes. Despite the diversity of instruments associated with various musical styles, these groups continued playing mostly traditional Mexican music. The addition of these instruments as well as the unique ways of playing them led to the creation of an evolving Texas-Mexican sound over the decades.

2. Incorporation of other musical influences

Throughout the twentieth century, a few innovative performers took selective rhythms from diverse musical styles and incorporated them into Mexican music. They chose from a wide variety of styles and from the instruments, songs, and dances associated with them. Most of these rhythms came from two major strands of popular music within the United States, rhythm and blues and rock and roll, and from Latin America and the Caribbean. These rhythms were creatively crafted onto traditional Mexican tunes. The result was an updated style of Mexican music such as “jazzy” boleros, “rock-influenced” polkas, “pop” or “rap” cumbias, “bluesy” baladas, and “big-band style” rancheras.

Occasionally, Tejano musicians provided only “touches” of music from other styles. Their incorporation into Tejano music was brief enough so that it did not interrupt the beat of the song. Let me cite two examples, one from Letty Guval and the second from El Conjunto Bernal. In the mid-1990s, Guval, a popular Tejana performer, recorded a ranchera entitled “Sentimiento.” At key points in the song and only for a few brief seconds, she incorporated some banda rhythms. The banda rhythms, in turn, were played by a tuba, an instrument not usually associated with música Tejana. This ranchera then only had “touches” of banda in it; it was not a banda song nor was it a “tuba-based” ranchera.

In the late 1970s, El Conjunto Bernal recorded a balada with touches of rock. In the song entitled “Senda Sin Luz,” Bernal opened up with a couple of seconds from the Doors’ most popular song, “Riders of the Storm.” Bernal continued using the well-known organ rhythms of this popular rock group throughout the song, but without losing the flavor of the ballad.

3. Addition of other rhythms

Most Tejano groups were quite diverse with respect to the music that they played. In addition to polkas, rancheras, and baladas, they also played dance tunes from other musical styles. Again, the tunes selected were diverse and varied between groups and across time. Beto Villa, for instance, recorded a variety of Latin American tunes such as mambos, boleros, danzones, porros, and guarachas. He also recorded several fox-trots and ragtime tunes. During the 1950s, Little Joe and Sunny recorded rhythm and blues and rock and roll songs. In the last several decades, grupos Tejanos such as Mazz, Selena, and Emilio recorded a variety of mariachi, banda, disco, rock, dance, and country music. In many cases, the American popular tunes were sung in
both Spanish and in English. Conjunto groups were not as experimental as orquestas or grupos but they occasionally recorded boleros, cumbias, and rock and roll.\textsuperscript{45}

Although Tejano musicians were quite versatile and played all types of music, non-Mexican tunes comprised only a small percentage of the total songs that they performed. The vast majority of songs in their repertoire, in other words, were Mexican tunes. This distinguished them from Mexican Americans in other parts of the country. In places such as Los Angeles, for instance, Mexican-American groups played mostly English songs and either ignored, rejected, or grudgingly played Mexican music.\textsuperscript{46}

4. Adaptation and appropriation of non-Mexican and Mexican tunes

The more creative artists at times recorded tunes from various styles, reinventing them to meet Tejano musical sensibilities. In other words, they “Tejanoized” the songs for their fans.\textsuperscript{47} Steve Jordan, for instance, recorded a Buck Owens song “Together Again” and added the accordion to it so that it could be danced in Tejano nightclubs.\textsuperscript{48} Mingo Saldivar, a conjunto artist from the 1960s took the popular Johnny Cash song “Ring of Fire,” rearranging it as a ranchera and adding bilingual lyrics.\textsuperscript{49} Priscilla y sus Balas de Plata took the popular disco song, “I Will Survive,” and transformed it into a cumbia with lyrics.\textsuperscript{50}

Traditional Mexican songs, on occasion, have also been reinvented for a Tejano audience. Ricardo Castillo, lead vocalist for La Diferencia, for instance, in the late 1990s took a popular Juan Gabriel ballad, “Querida,” and rearranged it as a ranchera for Tejano audiences. It was extremely well received throughout the state, as indicated by its constant playing on Tejano radio stations in places such as Corpus Christi and Houston.\textsuperscript{51}

5. Blending of ensembles and styles

Under some circumstances, Tejano groups blended diverse vocal traditions, ensembles, and musical styles. The orquesta and conjunto musicians of the late 1940s and early 1950s combined the vocal singing tradition with the social dance music of Tejanos to create contemporary música Tejana. A few musicians such as Conjunto Bernal, the Royal Jesters, and Los Dinos incorporated three and four-part harmony sounds into Tejano music in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{52} Isidro López in the 1950s, on the other hand, blended the conjunto and the orquesta ensembles to create a new sound that he called “Texachi” (a mixture of mariachi and Tejano).\textsuperscript{53} Roberto Pulido, in the 1970s, blended the orquesta and the conjunto sounds to create progressive conjunto.\textsuperscript{54} Emilio in 1989 added a new element to this progressive conjunto sound when he incorporated the grupo sound of the synthesizer into the conjunto.\textsuperscript{55} In the 1970s, Country Roland and others combined the country music of Anglo America with Mexican music to create Chicano country.\textsuperscript{56}

6. Local rhythms

Not all the musical traditions incorporated or combined with música Tejana were “foreign” in origin. A few of them were indigenous to Mexico. The most well known of these traditions in the contemporary period, I would argue, is the huapango, a dance form and song type from southern Tamaulipas and northern Vera Cruz. The drums of the early twentieth century likewise were of indigenous origins.

The incorporation, adaptation, appropriation, or blending of ensembles and styles, as shown above, has occurred throughout the twentieth century, leading to the distinct sounds known as música Tejana.\textsuperscript{57} Undoubtedly, more research needs to be conducted on these processes if we are to truly understand its complexity and nature.

Fifth, música Tejana is played by a variety of musical ensembles, not simply just conjuntos. By this I mean that different types of groups using particular mixes of instruments and vocalists play this music. It includes vocal groups of varying sizes as well as four distinct ensembles—conjuntos, orquestas, grupos, and country bands.\textsuperscript{58} Most of this music is for dancing purposes. The only exception to this is the vocal singing tradition. This type of musical performance, unlike the others to be discussed later, is sit-down or listening music, not dancing music. Historically, vocal singing has occurred in intimate family settings, in theatrical productions, and in a few selected community gatherings.\textsuperscript{59}

Vocal singing, as the name implies, was based on individuals singing a variety of songs including lyrical hymns, children’s songs, canciones de amor, corridos, and rancheras. The number of individuals who have sung these lyrics historically has varied between one and three. If only one person sang, he or she was known as a solista. If two persons sang, it was known as a dueto; if three of them sang, it was known as a trio.

Prior to the 1940s, vocal singing in Texas was usually male-dominated and accompanied by a guitar, a violin, or, on occasion, an accordion. After the 1940s, females were added to the mix of vocal singers. Female singers, both duets and solistas, were accompanied by a variety of instruments, including accordions and saxophones or trumpets. Beginning in the late 1940s, the vocal singing popularized by las mujeres (women) was incorporated into existing musical ensembles such as the conjunto or the orquestas. This in effect led to its decline as a viable tradition in Tejano music. It also led to the gradual exclusion of Tejanas from the recording industry since most of the vocal singers for the orquestas and conjuntos were male.\textsuperscript{60}

Although música Tejana encompasses the vocal singing tradition, it is mostly made up of musical ensembles devoted to social dance music. Over the last century and a half, four distinct ensembles have played Texas-Mexican music: orquestas, conjuntos, grupos, and country bands. The Spanish terms “orquesta,” “conjunto,” and “grupo” generally make reference to
a group or association of musicians, but, in Texas, they have distinct meanings.\textsuperscript{61}

The nineteenth-century orquesta was based primarily on string instruments such as violins, psalteries, vihuela, mandolins, guitars and contrabass. Occasionally, other instruments such as trumpets, trombones, clarinets, or tubas were used. If brass or wind instruments were used with the former, the ensemble was called an orquesta típica (typical orchestra). If only brass and wind instruments were used, they were orquestas de “pitos” (wind/brass orchestras) and called bandas. Those that used only string instruments were known as orquestas de cuerda (string orchestras). Bandas emerged in the later part of the nineteenth century and were not as popular as the other types of orquestas, especially among Tejanos. The other two types of orquestas, on the other hand, were readily found among the elite and working-class groups in México and in South Texas during the 1800s. Orquestas, in general, however, came to be identified with the middle classes in México by the latter part of the nineteenth century and in Texas by the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{62}

In the post-World War II era, the orquestas changed as some musical instruments were either dropped or replaced by new ones.\textsuperscript{63} In the two decades after the Second World War, saxophones, among other instruments, became extremely important in the modern orquestas. Organs and electric guitars were added to this particular ensemble in the 1960s and 1970s. These types of orquestas, in combination with other ensembles and the music that they played, came to be popularly known as “La Onda Chicana” during these two decades.\textsuperscript{64}

The conjunto was divided into two structurally distinct groups. One of these was known as a traditional conjunto, the other one as a progressive conjunto. The difference between these two types of conjuntos was not in the types of music they played, but in the particular types of instruments used.

The traditional conjunto was based primarily on the one-row or two-row button accordion, but it also consisted of two guitars, one of which was a bajo sexto, and a drum. Several theories as to the origins of the accordion have been proposed. One of these is that German and Czech immigrants who settled in San Antonio introduced it to Mexicans in the mid-1800s. The popularity of this instrument then spread southward. Manuel Peña says that German immigrants most likely introduced it to Mexicans in Monterrey in the same time period and that it traveled northward. Chris Strachwitz states that it was probably introduced to Mexicans in the Rio Grande Valley during the same time period and that it traveled both north and south.\textsuperscript{65} Still another scholar argues that it came by way of the Gulf Coast.\textsuperscript{66}

The other important instrument of the traditional conjunto was the bajo sexto, a twelve-string bass guitar. Scholars are unclear about how the bajo sexto reached Texas. Unlike accordions, which for the most part are made in Germany or Italy, bajo sextos are made in Texas and México.\textsuperscript{67}

The progressive conjunto adds one or more instruments to the basic four instrument ensemble. Among the instruments added, especially in the last three decades of the twentieth century, were the “pitos” (a set of saxophones and/or trumpets) and the keyboards (both organ and synthesizers). Roberto Pulido y Los Clásicos initiated the progressive conjunto tradition in the 1970’s when he added two saxophones to the traditional conjunto. Emilio Navaira added a new sound to the progressive conjunto ensemble in 1989 when he deleted the horns and instead added keyboards, especially the synthesizer, to the traditional conjunto.

The grupo Tejano, a relatively new innovation, is anchored in the keyboards, especially the organ and the synthesizer. Additionally, it utilizes a variety of string and wind instruments, drums (percussion), and vocal singers. Prior to the early 1990s, these types of groups did not utilize the accordion in their music.

The grupo Tejano is slightly different from the grupo phenomenon in México. In México, grupos are keyboard-driven as in Texas, but the musicians specialize in romantic ballads or in cumbias.\textsuperscript{68} In Texas, they do not specialize in baladas only; grupos
also sing or play a variety of other tunes such as cumbias, rancheras, country, and pop. Their repertoire, in other words, is more diverse than that of grupos Mexicanos.

Grupos Tejanos originated in the 1960s with the formation of Los Fabulosos Cuatro, but they did not emerge as a powerful force until the 1980s. The number of grupos expanded significantly during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Among the most popular grupos Tejanos in the 1990s were Mazz, La Mafia, and the former Selena y Los Dinos.

The Chicano country bands are unique to música Tejana. These types of groups have at least three general characteristics. First, they are small and have between four and six persons in the ensemble. They also depend on two important instruments for their sound, a violin and a steel guitar. Second, the vast majority of vocalists sing with a country twang. Third, these bands play traditional country music and traditional Mexican music but in their own style. For the most part, they “Mexicanize” traditional country music and “countrify” traditional Mexican songs such as “Los Laureles” or “Las M Argaritas.” The former is done by singing the lyrics in Spanish or bilingually, the latter by playing Mexican tunes with these instruments and by singing them with a country twang.

Little is known about the Chicano country bands or where they originated. The earliest recording of country music by a Tejano artist is in 1949. In this year, Johnny Herrera, from Corpus Christi, recorded the country music standard “Jealous Heart” in English and in Spanish for the Melco label. Two years later, he recorded the same song as “Corazon Celoso” for Decca Records. Herrera’s recording, however, was done with saxophones, trumpets, and the accordion, instruments associated with the orquesta style popularized by Beto Villa in the late 1940’s. He did not utilize the steel guitar and violin of traditional country groups.

The Chicano country bands, that is, those that sang with a country twang and used the violin and steel guitar in their recordings, probably originated sometime in the 1950s or 1960s along the lower Rio Grande Valley and became popular in the following two decades. One of these groups, The Country Roland Band, became extremely well known in the early 1970s and influenced other Tejano groups such as Rudy Tee Gonzales y Sus Reno Bops, Snowball & Co., Roberto Pulido y Los Clásicos and Mazz.

Música Tejana, then, is a particular form of border music developed by Tejanos for Tejanos. Because it is an “indigenous” creation, this music reflects the musical sensibilities of Tejanos, their complex historical experiences, their internal differentiation, and their ethnic identity. Música Tejana has been and continues to be a culturally significant symbol of collective pride, although it is extremely popular among non-Tejanos and in areas outside of South Texas. It is an organic symbol of Tejano life and not merely a commodity to be sold on the capitalist market. Several different types of ensembles, not merely conjuntos, also play música Tejana. In addition to conjuntos, this music is comprised of the vocal singing tradition and three other dance ensembles: orquestas, grupos, and Chicano country bands. Each of these ensembles has emerged at particular periods of time, competed with each other and other musical styles popular in the Tejano community, and risen or fallen from public view because of important social forces such as shifting aesthetic desires within the Tejano population, the introduction of new technologies, urbanization, and commercialization. In the early part of the twentieth century, for example, various types of orquestas and conjuntos emerged as popular musical forms in the Tejano community. In the latter part of the twentieth century, grupos Chicano country bands, and other hybrid ensembles with different mixes of musical instruments emerged and competed with orquestas and conjuntos for dominance.

Música Tejana likewise is rooted in select Mexican musical traditions comprised of many different types of songs and dances. Despite this diversity, the Mexican polka and the polka-based ranchera Tejana dominated for most of the twentieth century. This, however, began to change in the 1990s as a result of the increased popularity of the cumbia dance rhythm and the perceptible decline of the ranchera.

Finally, although música Tejana is rooted in Mexican musical traditions, it has been significantly modernized and updated over the decades. A variety of instruments and dance rhythms from other musical styles, for instance, have been incorporated into música Tejana. Texas-Mexican performers have also appropriated, adapted, or added a variety of distinct but different styles to this music and fashioned a sound that reflects their sensibilities and experiences. No one can say for sure what the future holds for música Tejana, but whatever new forms and styles emerge will definitely relate to the historical experiences, internal differences, and ethnic identity of the Tejano community. This music, in other words, will continue to be culturally significant to the Tejano population, regardless of its popularity or commercialization, because it is, in essence, an indigenous creation.
Notes
1 Manuel Peña, Musica Tejana (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 3-14.
4 Peña, xi, 184-186.
5 Vilma Maldonado, “Defining Tejano hard because it encompasses so much,” The Monitor (McAllen, Texas), October 14, 1997, 4A.
6 Ibid.
7 See Peña.
9 For an overview of the distinctiveness of the border in Tejano history see Américo Paredes, With His Pistol in His Hand (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957), 7-32.
13 Patoski, 12-13.
14 Alice, Texas, a rural community 45 miles west of Corpus Christi, in fact, was officially declared in the summer of 2000 as the “birthplace” of Musica Tejana by the state legislature. Carlos Truan, State Senator from the Corpus Christi area, discussed this legislative proclamation at an induction ceremony honoring over twenty artists and pioneers of the Tejano music industry. The author was chosen to be one of the presenters at the induction ceremony on Friday, August 25, 2000 at the Knights of Columbus (KC) Hall in Alice, Texas.
20 Paredes, 129-150.
21 Peña, Musica Tejana, 30.
22 This as well as other corridos can be found in Corridos y Tragedias de la Fontes: First Recordings of Historic Mexican American Ballads, Arhoolie, CD 7019 and CD 7020. For an analysis of the “Corridos of Gregorio Cortez” see Paredes, 1958.
23 Peña, 77.
24 Peña, 39. Peña notes that in the latter part of the century a new type of ranchera emerged. He argues that this “Texo-centric” ranchera was a variant of the ranchera that accepted the Texan myth of bigness. See p. 39.
25 Peña argues that the canción tipica was also known as a canción Mexicana in the early part of the century. Peña, p. 50.
26 Peña, 39.
27 Peña argues that the treacherous woman theme was a form of ideology displacement that transposed issues of class relations to the gender domain. Peña, 54. Lydia Mendosa bucked the practice of casting women as deceitful lovers. For some examples see the collection of hits during the 1930s, Lydia Mendosa, Mal Hombre, Arhoolie CD-7002, 1992.
28 The unique instrumentation of the orquesta, grupo, and conjunto ensembles will be explained in a later section.
29 Peña, 50-51.
30 Musica romántica acquired the label of música moderna in the post-WWII era. Peña, 60.
31 The ranchera and the romántica illustrated a much larger relationship between the country and the city and its ideological articulation. The concepts of lo ranchero and lo jaión encapsulated the ideological contradictions embodied in the concepts of the city (capitalism) and the country (feudalism), an idealized rural communitarian experience accompanied by backward, uncivilized poon and an idealized modernizing urban middle-class experience. Peña, 63.
33 Peña, 3-14.
34 Burr, 1999, 105.
36 Sordo Soli notes that there are various types of ranchera songs. One of these is the canciones nortes played by norteño groups. These songs were at once accompanied on the vihuela. Beginning in 1850, harp, vihuela, and psaltery were used in the accompaniment of these songs. Around 1890 the jarana and guitar came into use; the accordion appeared later. Canciones nortes became popular in the capital in the 1920s. From there they radiated all over the country. Thieronorteo ensemble, as it is known in the 1970s, was not more than 25 years old. Cited in Antonio González, Mexican American Musicians: A History (Houston: Privately printed, no date), p. 98.
37 Peña, 51-53, argues that the canción ranchera, sung primarily by vocal duets, became powerfully charged with class and gender implications in the second quarter of the twentieth century. The songs were gender biased and coalesced around the theme of the treacherous woman. This theme, however, reversed existing gender norms, rather than reflected them.
38 For examples of the relative increase in corridas during the 1990s see the following two albums: Intocable, Intocable, Capitol EM1, CD - H19049517820, 1998; Selena, Baila Esta Cumbia, Capitol-EMI, Case 78199790524, 1992.
39 Little Joe, for instance, recorded the song “Las Nubes” bilingually in the late 1970s. Ram Herrera recently recorded a “Never Ending Love,” a ranchera with English lyrics. For a sophisticated cultural and musical analysis of “Las Nubes” and several other songs by Little Joe see Manuel Peña, Mexican American Orquesta (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 244-259.
40 These processes have been called “bimusicality” by Pena and “hybridity” by Burr. For a complex analysis of the former see Peña, The Mexican American Orquesta, especially 277-274. On hybridity see Burr, 1999, 15-39.
42 Conjunto Bernal, Aurora, GS160, 1983. This is probably the date of its release. I originally heard the album in the summer of 1978 when I moved to Santa Barbara, California. My cousin, Elias Soto, a displaced Tejano living in California, had gone to Texas and bought it for his listening pleasure. He introduced it to me the first day I visited him in Santa Barbara. This album then must have been recorded in the late 1970s.
43 To hear some of his original recordings issued between 1948 and 1954 see Beto Villa: Father of Orquesta Tejana, Arhoolie CD 364, 1992.
44 For examples of this type of music see Sunny & the Sunliners, Little Brown Eyed Soul, Key-Loc, KL-3005, n.d. and Little Joe and the Latinaires, Unbeatable, Tomi Records, tp1002, n.d. All the songs in these albums are in English and recorded during the 1950s.
45 In 1957, for instance, El Conjunto Bernal recorded a rock and roll song entitled “La Novia Antonia.” This selection can be found in Tejano Roots, Raices Tejanas, Arhoolie, CD 341, 1991. Peña refers to this development as the “triumph of the anti-ranchero. See Manuel Peña, The Mexican American Orquesta (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 166-199.
46 Some groups have Tejanized other styles so that they reflect the experiences of Mexican Americans in the barrio but have not rearranged the tunes so that Tejanos can dance them. One of these is Randy Garibay, the great Tejano bluesman. He records old-time blues but with lyrics that reflect the experiences of Mexican Americans in the barrios of San Antonio, Texas. See, Randy Garibay, Barbara Blues, Angelita M la Produccion Company, [no CD number], 1998; and Cats Don’t Sleep, Angelita M la Produccion, RGC-CD 3943, no date.
48 This song can be heard in The Best of the 11th Annual Tejano Conjunto Festival, (1992). (San Antonio: Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center Produc-
56 Country Roland recorded a large number of albums in the 1970s and early 1980s. See, for example, Emilio Navaíra & Rio Band, Sensaciones, CBS, CRC-80329, 1990.

57 For an excellent analysis of this process as reflected in the modern form of the orquesta see Peña, The Mexican American Orquesta, 1999, especially 227-274.

58 One other type of group was the banda. Bandas utilized mostly wind-based or strings instruments such as clarinet, cornet, flutes, trumpets, trombones, and tuba. Many of them also had one or two sets of drums. Although some bandas groups have been popular in the Tejano community, especially along the border, no banda group recorded Tejano music during the 20th century. The association of banda music with military functions or marching bands among the popular imagination probably accounts for this lack of popularity among Tejanos.


61 Several scholars have used the term “Tejano” synonymously with what I call “grupos.” Tejano however is an ambiguous and confusing term that encompasses all groups currently playing Música Tejana. Even Peña himself provides two confusing definitions of “Tejano.” In the preface, he argues that Tejano is comprised of “the most recent crop of synthesizer-driven ensembles and their styles.” XI. Later he expands this definition and argues that Tejano is comprised of “the various Texas Mexican musical groups and their styles” played in the 1990s. (184). Ramiro Burr, the well-known music columnist for the San Antonio Light argues that “Tejano” includes styles including orquestas that originated in the post-World War II era and the progressive conjuntos. See Burr, 1999, 197.


63 The songs and dances played by these orquestas also changed over time. The changing repertoire is discussed in a later section.

64 For a history of “La Onda Chicana” and the major orquestas playing this music during the 1960s and 1970s, see Peña, 1999.

65 Peña argues that it most likely originated in Mexico. Violent confrontations between Anglos and Mexicanos in Boss also discouraged its use in the Mexican community. German settlements, especially workers in Monterrey probably introduced it to the community. Peña, The Texas-American Conjunto, 33.


68 The bajo sexto has a thicker neck than a regular guitar and has a feature called a “cutaway,” which improves resonance. The electric bass replaced the bajo sexto’s bass function in many conjuntos in the 1950s, and today the bajo sexto mainly serves as a rhythm instrument. Burr, 1999, 58.

69 They also do not give billing to any members of the group. Burr, 1999, 102.

70 Patoski, Selena, 23.
